

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NSCE-00 EB-08 FAA-00 DOTE-00 L-03

H-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 FRB-03 SSO-00 INRE-00 USIE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 INR-07 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 EUR-12 /074 W

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FM AMEMBASSY NASSAU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9290

C O N F I D E N T I A L NASSAU 0566

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, BF

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER PRESSED IN HOUSE ON FACILITIES TERMS

REF A) NASSAU 0353 B) NASSAU 0361

1. CITING LEAKED DOLS 175 MILLION FIGURE (REFS), INDEPENDENT M.P. MICHAEL LIGHTBOURN REQUESTED HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY APRIL 20 TO APPOINT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE WHY GCOB HAS NOT YET SIGNED FACILITIES AGREEMENT WITH USG. DENYING THAT HE HAS EVER "BEEN MADE AWARE AT ANY TIME THAT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN OFFERED ANY SUM LIKE DOLS 12 MILLION A YEAR FOR THE LEASE OF THE BASE" AND STATING THAT "THE MATTER HAS NOT BEEN A BONE OF CONTENTION OR SORE POINT BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS" PRIME MINISTER PINDLING REPLIED BY ASKING POLITICIANS AND PUBLIC NOT TO MAKE FACILITIES NEGOTIATIONS A "POLITICAL FOOTBALL." "IT IS NOT THE POLICY OF GOVERNMENT," HE ADDED, "TO DISCUSS PRIVATE TALKS ON THE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE."

2. PRESSED BY THE TRIBUNE'S IVAN JOHNSON, WHOSE APRIL 21 ARTICLE ON THE VERBAL EXCHANGE IN THE HOUSE FOLLOWS BELOW, THE AMBASSADOR HAS CONTINUED TO RESPOND "NO COMMENT."

3. DURING HIS FAREWELL CALL ON PINDLING, WHICH WE HAVE
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REQUESTED FOR EARLY NEXT WEEK, THE AMBASSADOR WILL EXPRESS AGREEMENT THAT PRIVATE TALKS SHOULD BE KEPT OUT OF PUBLIC DISCUSSION AND REASSURE PRIME MINISTER THAT EMBASSY WAS NOT SOURCE OF THE LEAK. MEANWHILE, WE WILL CONTINUE EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY THE NON-EMBASSY SOURCE.

4. TEXT OF JOHNSON ARTICLE FOLLOWS: QUOTE

PINDLING'S AUTECH PLEA

BY IVAN JOHNSON

PRIME MINISTER PINDLING YESTERDAY ISSUED A STERN WARNING TO BAHAMIAN CITIZENS AND MPS IN THE HOUSE.

"DON'T MAKE THE SIGNING OF THE LEASE ON THE ANDROS AUTECH NAVAL BASE WITH THE US GOVERNMENT A POLITICAL FOOTBALL," SAID THE PRIME MINISTER.

"THE MATTER HAS NOT BEEN A BONE OF CONTENTION OR SORE POINT BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS AND IT WOULD BE WRONG OF ANY BAHAMIAN CITIZEN, WHETHER HE BE A MEMBER OF THIS HOUSE OR NOT, TO TRY TO MAKE THIS A SORE POINT," HE SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER WAS REPLYING TO MP MIKE LIGHTBOURN'S MOVE FOR A COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHY GOVERNMENT HAS NOT YET SIGNED THE LEASE FOR THE BASE WITH THE US GOVERNMENT.

THE PRIME MINISTER DENIED MR. LIGHTBOURN'S CLAIM THAT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN OFFERED DOLS 175 MILLION OVER 15 YEARS (ABOUT DOLS 12 MILLION A YEAR) FOR THE LEASE OF THE BASE.

"I HAVE NEVER BEEN MADE AWARE AT ANY TIME THAT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN OFFERED ANY SUM LIKE DOLS 12 MILLION A YEAR FOR THE LEASE OF THE BASE. AND IF NO AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES, WHO HAVE BEEN TALKING FOR SOME TIME, IT MUST MEAN THAT THEIR MINDS HAVEN'T YET COME TOGETHER.

"AS FAR AS I'M AWARE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BAHAMAS GOVERNMENT AND THE US GOVERNMENT REMAIN CORDIAL AND THE QUESTION OF THE LEASE HASN'T AFFECTED OUR RELATIONSHIP.

"THE MATTER IS STILL TO BE CONCLUDED AND IT'S NOT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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POLICY OF GOVERNMENT TO DISCUSS PRIVATE TALKS ON THE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE. THAT WOULD BE AN INSULT," SAID THE PRIME MINISTER.

EARLIER MP MIKE LIGHTBOURN HAD TOLD MPS THAT THE US GOVERNMENT PLANNED TO SPEND SOME DOLS 30 MILLION DEVELOPING THE AUTECH BASE ONCE GOVERNMENT HAS SIGNED A LEASE.

BUT HE SAID IT WAS HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAS NOT YET RECEIVED ANY REPLY ON THE MATTER FROM THE BAHAMIAN GOVERNMENT.

HE SAID, "SINCE GOVERNMENT IS APPARENTLY LOOKING FOR NEW SOURCES OF REVENUE WHY ARE THEY TAKING SO LONG TO DRAW UP A LEASE ON THE BASE?

"DOLS 12 MILLION A YEAR WOULD BE A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT. IN FACT, IT WOULD BE MORE THAN THE REVENUE TAKEN FROM THE PARADISE ISLAND AND FREEPORT CASINOS.

"THE PUBLIC SHOULD KNOW WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON OVER THE LAST FOUR YEARS. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID TALKS ON THE LEASE SHOULD HAVE BEEN COMPLETED BY 1975. BUT THIS IS A LONG TIME TO HOLD TALKS WITH A FRIENDLY NEIGHBOUR," HE SAID.

A RECENT TRIBUNE STORY CLAIMED THAT THE BAHAMAS GOVERNMENT

HAS BEEN SITTING FOR TWO YEARS ON AN OFFER OF DOLS 175 MILLION
OVER 15 YEARS BY THE US GOVERNMENT FOR THE LEASE OF THE ANDROS
AUTEC BASE.

A RELIABLE SOURCE SAID US OFFICIALS ARE ANNOYED BECAUSE
THE US HAS NOT RECEIVED ANY REPLIES FROM THE BAHAMIAN GOVERN-
MENT DESPITE REPEATED OFFERS FOR THE LEASE MADE BY THE US
OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS.

AT THE TIME OF THE STORY EXTERAL AFFAIRS OFFICIALS REFUSED
TO COMMENT AND NO GOVERNMENT STATEMENT WAS MADE.

HOWEVER, SHORTLY AFTER PRIME MINISTER PINDLING DID NOT
DENY THE TRIBUNE REPORT WHEN ASKED IF IT WAS TRUE ON THE RADIO
PROGRAMME CONTACT.

THE PRIME MINISTER TOLD REPORTERS ON THE PROGRAMME THAT
HE WAS SURPRISED THE SOURCE OF THE STORY HAD NOT TOLD THE
TRIBUNE THE AMOUNT OF THE BAHAMIAN GOVERNMENT'S COUNTER OFFER.

US EMBASSY OFFICIALS IN THE BAHAMAS HAVE REFUSED TO
COMMENT. UNQUOTE
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